

SHEDDING THE BLINDERS

Breaking Through Roadblocks to Learning

A presentation to the 5th Annual Conference on
Civilian Education and Professional
Development

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PURPOSE

FORMAL REASON

- ▶ *To initiate a dialogue addressing both the need for and the feasibility of undertaking “unlearning” as a necessary prerequisite to senior executive-level education.*

REAL REASON

- ▶ *To harvest the expertise and experience of veteran practitioners in the field.*



GENESIS

- ▶ *The Gemini twins of “Paradigm Shift” and “out-of-the-box” thinking.*
- ▶ *A staple of Senior Service College education – “Truth in Advertising?”*
- ▶ *The Barriers –*
 - ▶ *Diverse student bodies*
 - ▶ *Successful Type A “overachievers”*
 - ▶ *Divergent educational imperatives – “schizophrenia”*
 - ▶ *Time!*



“UNLEARNING” TOUCHSTONES



CONDITIONING

- ▶ *The culprit?*
- ▶ *Literally “lifelong” phenomenon*
- ▶ *Numerous agents*
- ▶ *Essential for societal existence*
- ▶ *Thorndike (1913), Skinner (1958), Piaget*
 - ▶ *Thank your cat!*
- ▶ *The “Box” industry was founded here*
- ▶ *Key to deconditioning: “Create openings”*
 - ▶ *“Creative Tensions” WRT to Change*
 - ▶ *Metacognition possible tool*



FLIGHT TRAINING

✦ *Research suggests:*

- ✦ *piloting skills requires the unlearning of typical perceptions and responses*
- ✦ *Emotional processes impact on sensory limitations; distort reality and cause inaccurate judgments*
- ✦ *Assumptions and expectations limit the accuracy of perceptions*
- ✦ *Ego, fear, and self-confidence affect judgment and decision making.*
- ✦ *Tendency to over-value more vivid experiences and under-value or forget less vivid or infrequent events.*
- ✦ *Especially operational events in the professional development of military and civilian selected for senior service college!*



SALES TRAINING

- ▶ Warren Weschler – *Study of Salesperson ineffectiveness*
- ▶ “Single point of Failure” -- the word **No!**
 - ▶ From the “toddler stage” (Lifelong learning??)
- ▶ Suggests negative relationship between “No” and development of intellectual curiosity and *willingness to shift paradigms and accept new modes of thinking!*
- ▶ Advice to PM’s and acquisition types: “Don’t sign anything until you read it and talk to your lawyer!”

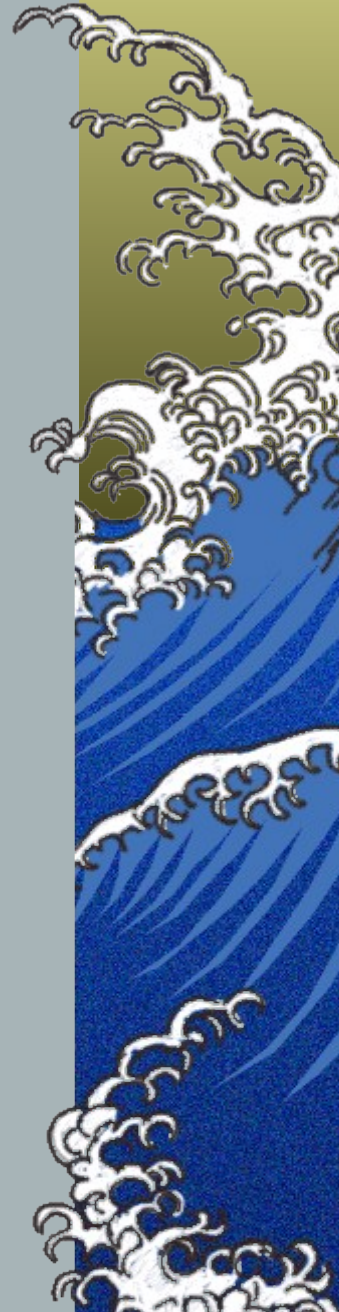


UNLEARNING MISINFORMATION

- ★ *Gentry and Dyer (2000) – Univ of Illinois Finance Students*

Potential Remedies

- ★ *Quick diagnostic probes – Non-threatening*
- ★ *Examples, analogies, metaphors*
 - ★ *Yours & theirs*
- ★ *Feedback*
- ★ *Focused study questions*



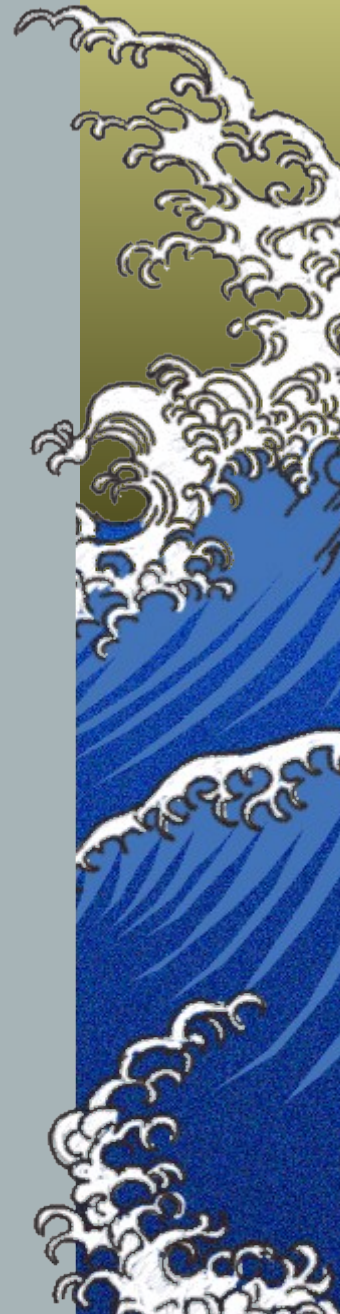
SNAKES, APES, AND ELEPHANTS

- ▲ *Sranko – “The Great Unlearning”*
 - ▲ *Ego – Barrier to the Great Unknown*
 - ▲ *Protective Membranes – Mental Shells*
 - ▲ *Social beings build multiple barriers*
 - ▲ *Learn from own experience and experience of others*
 - ▲ *Need to “let go!”*
- ▲ *Biernbaum & Weinberg (1990) – “Men Unlearning Rape”*
 - ▲ *Fear of unfamiliar as deterrent to change*
 - ▲ *Change is not immediate (but starts immediately)*
 - ▲ *Don’t trivialize, deny or misrepresent*
 - ▲ *Give respect and demand it for yourself!*



UNLEARNING TECHNOLOGIES

- ★ *STARBUCK (NYU, 1996)*
 - ★ *Technologists hang on to the dear end*
 - ★ *“failures” most effective unlearning device*
 - ★ *Specialists and “niches” become evolutionary “dead-ends.”*
 - ★ *Create coherent, rational support structures –*
 - ★ *Swedish ASW Operations*
 - ★ *Difficult to deal with conflicting information*
 - ★ *Organizational change –*
 - ★ *“frame-breaking” due to anticipation of environment*
 - ★ *Starbuck: unlearning of old perceptual networks.*
 - ★ *“Top Management” complicity – “Crucial Nexus”*
 - ★ *Block subordinates*
 - ★ *Believe they know more than they do*
 - ★ *Overlook “Bad News”*
 - ★ *Blame others*



UNLEARNING TECHNOLOGIES

Fostering Unlearning

- ▲ *Dissatisfaction (“Ain’t Good Enough”)*
- ▲ *“It’s only an experiment!”*
- ▲ *“Surprises are question marks.”*
- ▲ *“All dissenters and warnings have validity.”*
- ▲ *“Collaborators who disagree are both right.”*
- ▲ *“A stranger’s views.”*
- ▲ *“Causal arrows have two heads*
- ▲ *“Converse of every proposition is equally valid.”*

THE CRITICAL MASS: **DOUBT!!**



LIFELONG UNLERANING

Pateman (2002)

- ▲ *“Acquisition Society”*
- ▲ *Unlearning: other half of cognitive dialectic*
- ▲ *Emotional Dimension –*
 - ▲ *Major impact*
 - ▲ *“feelings enable or frustrate learning and unlearning*
 - ▲ *Relationships with ideas, knowledge, theories is critical*
 - ▲ *Affective domain*
- ▲ *Language – “You don’t Say?”*
 - ▲ *Proud, jealous, insecure, tired, confident*
 - ▲ *“Wedded to...” “Love affair with...” “intellectual bully”*



LIFELONG UNLEARNING

- ✦ *Forgetting – No rewards*
- ✦ *Lapsing – Loss of Libidinal energy*
- ✦ *Conversion – With “replacement”*
- ✦ *Rejection – Without “replacement”*
- ✦ *Epiphany – Switch belief sets*
- ✦ *Unravelling – Find the wrong turn*



LIFELONG UNLEARNING

- ▶ *Epiphany - The educator's Lorelei*
 - ▶ *Major or modest - “apostrophes”*
 - ▶ *Requires inner prep work & doubt*
 - ▶ *Neglected phenomenon*
 - ▶ *Can't control*
 - ▶ *Can't predict*
 - ▶ *Can't engineer*
 - ▶ *Commonalities with “switching”*
 - ▶ *Solve low-level practical problems*
 - ▶ *Bottom line: Old way has to be unlearned!*



LIFELONG UNLEARNING

✦ *Unravelling*

- ✦ *From Psychoanalysis*
- ✦ *Locate point of error*
- ✦ *“defective strategies”*
- ✦ *“lay bare” misguided habitual strategies*
- ✦ *Akin to fault tree analysis*



LIFELONG UNLEARNING

✦ *Limitations*

- ✦ *Time Available*
- ✦ *Sensitivity of overachievers*
- ✦ *Not in the psychoanalysis business*

✦ *Techniques*

- ✦ *Questioning (assumptions and values)*
- ✦ *Case Studies (historical and personal)*



THE UNLEARNING TOOLBOX

- ▲ *“What have you done for me lately?”*
- ▲ *Foster Critical Thinking*
 - ▲ *Socratic Technique*
 - ▲ *Role Playing - switch the bookends*
 - ▲ *Focus of values and assumptions*
- ▲ *Targeted reading and reporting assignments*
- ▲ *Case Studies*
- ▲ *Metaphoric thinking*
- ▲ *Go slow*
- ▲ *Incremental approach*
- ▲ *Avoid “flooding”*
- ▲ *Facilitate Metacognition*
- ▲ *Feedback*



THE UNLEARNING TOOLBOX

- ♣ *Respect! Respect! Respect!*
 - ♣ *No trivialize, deny, or misrepresent*
- ♣ *Patience!*
 - ♣ *“A stone in a deep well”*



CHALLENGES

- ▶ *Successful Students = Strong Egos*
 - ▶ *Self-Confident*
 - ▶ *Threats*
 - ▶ *Fears*
- ▶ *Time Available*
 - ▶ *Course duration: 2 weeks or 10 months?*
- ▶ *Student/Teacher Ratio*
 - ▶ *Not Psychotherapy!*

